

Stewardship with Vision



**2023
NATIONAL POLICY
PLATFORM**



PAYING FOR STEWARDSHIP

Working lands provide a wide range of public benefits, including food, fiber, water, and wildlife habitat, among others. However, these lands disappear when they cannot sustain reasonable livelihoods and when they are not economically viable. Meaningful economic drivers for land and water stewardship are needed to conserve working lands and sustain rural economies.

PRIORITIES

- Expand habitat leasing on private lands. These multi-year agreements can be tailored to address a range of goals and make it economically feasible for landowners to manage for both production and conservation values.
- Improve the structure, delivery and accessibility of Farm Bill Conservation Title and other federal conservation programs. These programs are important, but many are overly complex, underfunded, difficult to access and not adequately promoted.
- Further develop federal and state wildlife and natural resource trust funds or endowments to support multi-year conservation, restoration and stewardship agreements and initiatives.
- Uphold landowner's private property rights, including the ability to control access and generate income from non-agricultural activities. Continue to improve and expand voluntary access programs, and improve land exchange processes for voluntary exchanges to address inholdings and other issues.
- Develop an agency-wide BLM restoration policy to establish a consistent approach to restoring BLM administered lands and ensure conceptual alignment with similar policy or guidance at other land management agencies for maximum impact.
- Reform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to support conservation and stewardship on public working lands and on private lands via the federal nexus.



STEWARDED WATER RESOURCES

Landowners and producers in the West are facing the reality of increasingly frequent and severe water shortages. Considerable state federal resources exist to promote water conserving land management practices, infrastructure improvement and watershed restoration activities that will enhance drought resiliency. However, questions remain over implications from state water law. Solutions are needed to balance meaningful water conservation with ecosystem health and food security.

- Improve accessibility to and better jointly leverage the variety of funding streams across federal Departments focused on water conservation, watershed health and community-based planning and conservation.
- Address barriers to water conservation and watershed health improvement created by state and federal laws and regulations.

PRIORITIES

- Expand and improve support for water conservation and management measures through the Farm Bill, including expanded opportunities for producers to receive financial support for water saving measures under the Conservation Reserve Program, and increase program flexibility to meet the needs of Western producers.

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REDUCING CONFLICT ON WORKING LANDS

Landowners appreciate and value wildlife and understand the importance of sharing the landscape. At the same time, migrating wildlife like elk or other big game can damage fencing, increase forage competition, and introduce the risk of disease transmission. Large carnivores - expanding in range and abundance - can create direct livestock loss or introduce indirect losses through their presence. Effective conflict reduction work will depend on a holistic approach including conflict prevention, compensation, lethal control and collaboration (the Four Cs).

PRIORITIES

- Better support landowners in implementing conflict reduction practices through increasing access to technical and financial assistance, expanding Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation practices to encompass conflict reduction, increasing state and federal agency capacity and updating the Farm Bill to support conflict reduction on working lands.
- Develop and increase funding for depredation compensation programs that capture the true cost of wildlife-livestock conflict, increase funding and training for depredation investigators and explore opportunities to expand federal funding for depredation compensation.

MORE AT

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Below: Mule deer graze on an irrigated pasture in western Colorado. Photo by Kenyon Fields.



EMPOWERING LOCALLY-LED CONSERVATION

Successful models of place-based or community-based conservation often have strong and trusted local leadership, intimate knowledge of local challenges and stakeholder dynamics and deep connections to both the surrounding communities and landscapes. These examples underscore the value of conservation supporting traditional livelihoods and rural communities. There is tremendous untapped potential to support and expand this network of community-based groups' capacity to assemble large-scale conservation projects, conduct educational outreach, provide technical assistance and connect landowners with federal and state resources and programs. However, many of these organizations lack human, technical and financial capacity to grow and sustain these efforts over time..

PRIORITIES

- Create jointly-funded, co-located resource coordinator positions – housed within community-based organizations, land trusts or local NGOs – to work across agencies and provide support and technical assistance to landowners.
- Develop more predictable, consistent and accessible funding streams aimed at supporting the development, growth and ongoing operation of community-based organizations.
- Invest in the human capacity needed within the federal workforce and the communities they serve to support community-based conservation, leverage resources and deliver technical assistance.

Right: Electrified fencing protects a carcass composting site maintained by the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group in Montana.



CONSERVING AND RECOVERING WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY

The owners and managers of private working lands are essential partners in the conservation of wildlife. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is an important safety net for wildlife; however, the ESA should not serve only as a last stop measure to prevent species extinction but a tool for species recovery and driver of proactive conservation of at-risk species. Addressing wildlife habitat loss and species decline will require a shift in policymaking that recognizes and rewards sound stewardship first and foremost before using regulatory measures.

PRIORITIES

- Enhance regulatory certainty for voluntary, landowner-driven conservation through improved access to voluntary conservation agreements, on federal and private lands, including expanded applicability of agreements to cover at-risk species.
- Address structural gaps in long-term implementation of regulatory assurance agreements, including providing dedicated funding for third party entities to develop and monitor agreements.
- Secure increased dedicated funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife agencies to conduct proactive conservation of at-risk species and conduct outreach to landowners with partner organizations and agencies.



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Below: O'Dell creek in the Madison Valley of Montana has been restored by a private landowner and once again provides habitat for arctic grayling, trumpeter swans and other imperiled species.

